

The Christian News-Letter

No. 234

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

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DEAR MEMBER,

The war in Europe is at an end.

As we look back on the astonishing experiences through which we have lived, the outstanding marvel for us in Britain is the deliverance of this country, when all seemed lost but faith and courage, from the fate which has now overtaken Germany. This nation in 1940, confronted with a deadly threat to its existence and having been given a leader with power to evoke its deep will and purpose, made a response that has changed the course of history. It was an act of faith, taking no account of probabilities and knowing only that the challenge was one that could not be refused.

Once again, in the question what we shall do with victory, we are confronted with a fresh test—less immediately obvious, perhaps, but no less real and searching. Great Britain is one of the three principal victors who, in the years immediately ahead, have power by their action or inaction to determine the future destinies of mankind. Her material resources are inferior to those of her two great allies, but she has other assets to bring to the common task. She "has had longer experience," Dr. Niebuhr tells us in his latest book, "in wielding power in world affairs than America. Through this experience Britain has learned to exercise critical restraint upon her power impulses to a larger degree than her critics realize."

The question which now confronts us is whether we have, not only the force to withstand the barbarian aggressor, but the spiritual strength to succeed in the more difficult task of embracing afresh the imperishable values of our tradition, filling them with new meaning and making a sustained effort to give them appropriate embodiment in the circumstances of to-day. What are these values? The Bishop of Chichester in a speech in the House of Lords, which we reprinted as a Supplement (C.N.-L. No. 225), spoke of four spiritual traditions which are the foundations of European civilization. These are the humanist tradition, with its love of liberty and its humanitarian sympathies; the scientific tradition, with its fearless search for truth; the tradition of the rule of law; and the Christian religion which gave unity to Europe and vitalized its whole spiritual and intellectual life. It is as the champion and defender of that European tradition that Great Britain has stood forth in the eyes of the peoples of Europe in this war.

The essential thing is that there should arise a body of men and women who are fundamentally persuaded that these are the things that make life worth living and who will dedicate themselves in common to their realization. We cannot meet successfully the second great test with which life confronts us by any self-reliant choice of our own, but only by a humble response to the claim of God made on us in Christ and in our past and present historical experiences. We must submit ourselves to the work of grace, allowing unseen powers to quicken our minds to new levels of apprehension and to lead us to fresh acts of obedience, and go forward in the knowledge that we are being guided, sustained and judged by a Wisdom and Love which we can confidently trust.

“THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT AND THE CHILDREN OF DARKNESS”

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr has once more placed us under his debt by a fresh contribution in his latest book ¹ to our understanding of the political tasks to which we have to address ourselves in the post-war world. He believes that democracy, if it is to survive, needs a more realistic vindication than is offered by humanistic and liberal thought and that the Christian conception of life provides such a vindication. Democracy has deeper roots than the ideas which were the weapons of the commercial classes in their struggle with feudal society, and which gave democracy its modern form. Its ultimate justification is the nature of man as a spiritual, free and social being.

The weakness of liberalism was that it underestimated the perils of freedom and the excesses to which it may lead, and assumed that the establishment of harmony between self-interest and the general good was much easier to achieve than it actually is. Authoritarian political doctrines, on the other hand, are based on a profoundly pessimistic view of human nature, though in these theories the *ruler* is unaccountably assumed to be cast in a different mould from the rest. In actual fact, if men in general are inclined to deal unjustly with their fellows, the possession of power aggravates the inclination. The real argument for democracy is not that men are essentially rational and naturally disposed to mutual accommodation, but that the love of power is so inordinate a passion that democracy is the only alternative to injustice and oppression.

This is merely a pointer to a theme which Dr. Niebuhr elaborates with full mastery of the history of political thought and with incisive force and great cumulative effect. The book is packed with significant matter, but the thought is so condensed that the going

¹ *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness.* Nesbit, 7s. 6d.

will not be easy for those without previous knowledge of Dr. Niebuhr's thought. All who have the time and patience, however, to absorb the contents of this small volume will find themselves fortified for the fight that lies ahead. Dr. Niebuhr's profound interpretation of the meaning of democracy is of peculiar importance at the present time, when we are confronted, on the one hand, with a cynical disbelief in the capacities of men to achieve in their public relations a justice which transcends all partial interests, and, on the other hand, with an enthusiasm for democracy which leaves out of account the self-discipline, public spirit and individual faithfulness that are essential for its realization.

The last chapter deals with the attempt to create a world community, which in Dr. Niebuhr's view is "the most urgent of all the issues which face our epoch." Here the difficulties to be overcome are so formidable that we cannot be certain that the step is within the possibilities of history. None the less the Christian faith that Christ is the final norm of human existence makes it impossible for Christians to stop short of the whole human community in the endeavour to give social expression to our moral responsibility for the life and welfare of others.

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

It is plain that the Christian News-Letter, whose existence coincides with the duration of the war, faces an entirely new situation in the post-war period. The decision to launch it was taken in the first week of the war, and the first issue appeared less than six weeks later. It seemed to those who were consulted that in this overwhelming crisis an effort should be made to enlist as many as possible of the best Christian minds in a joint endeavour to understand its deeper meanings and to communicate what they learned to wide circles. The list of collaborators published in our early issues showed how warm was the response to this attempt. War conditions, with their exacting demands on everyone concerned, and the limitations imposed by the smallness of our staff, made it impossible to maintain effective contact with some of those who promised their help, although as years passed links were made with new friends. Throughout its whole existence the News-Letter, which in its inception owed an immense debt to the initiative and inspiration of Miss Iredale, has had the loyal and devoted support of a small editorial board, which has met with unfailing regularity, at first weekly and later fortnightly, to consider and criticize each issue. The formation of the Christian Frontier in 1942 brought to the Christian News-Letter many new friends, and their number is steadily growing.

Though most of the News-Letters have appeared under a single signature, the Christian News-Letter has been from first to last a co-operative undertaking. That it has been able during the war years to enlist and retain a constituency, averaging throughout the period about 10,000 subscribers, with a considerably larger number of readers, has been due in the main to their recognition and appreciation of the fact that it was our aim to keep in close touch with the widest range of Christian thought and action, and also with what is significant in secular thought and practice. The reception given to the Christian News-Letter shows that, if you have the right aim, even though you may succeed in achieving only a small fraction of what you set out to do, the response may be far in excess of your expectations or deserts.

The News-Letter has now to enter on a second stage and address itself to the task of serving the Christian cause in the post-war world. New problems are arising on every hand. New men and women, released from the forces, will have responsibility for dealing with them. If the Christian News-Letter is to keep abreast of these new developments, the younger generation must take the task in hand. We have foreseen this for some time and have set ourselves to provide for it. The necessary condition of the News-Letter playing its full part in the situation described in the earlier paragraphs of this Letter is that the editorship should be transferred to younger hands.

For the work of the Christian Frontier and the Christian News-Letter in the post-war period a staff of several people with varied gifts is essential. The range of questions which concern Christians in contemporary society is so large, that the Christian News-Letter needs to be fed by a continuous stream of information and knowledge from those who are in constant touch with the different spheres of human activity. The Christian News-Letter cannot exist in isolation. It can justify itself only if through the activities of the Christian Frontier feelers are being put out in a great variety of directions.

There has never been any doubt or hesitation about who should take over the editorship of the Christian News-Letter. The Editorial Board of the News-Letter and the Council of the Christian Frontier, both comprising men and women of widely different outlook and experience, were clear from the first that it must be Kathleen Bliss. I have never known any body of people arrive so quickly and with so little debate at complete unanimity about a matter of importance. For one who is still in the thirties, Kathleen Bliss has already an astonishingly wide range of personal contacts. Almost all of those who have helped the News-Letter in the past

are her friends, and it has been proved for many months that their co-operation will be given as readily and generously to her as it has been given to me. Those who are in the best position to judge of the capacity of the new editor have the utmost confidence in the future of the Christian News-Letter.

Mrs. Bliss will not be left to shoulder the burden alone. The members of the Editorial Board have assured her that they will give their help as unstintedly as in the past. I shall regard it as a first claim on my time and strength to meet any demands she may make on me. Moreover, we are at last in a position to provide for the Christian News-Letter the kind of staff in quality and numbers which we have always wanted to have behind it, but in the difficult war years have not been able to obtain.

The Council of the Christian Frontier have asked me for a short time longer to devote the energies set free by my giving up the News-Letter to developing the policy and activities of the Christian Frontier and, in particular, to recruiting the staff for which we have so long been waiting. We have made a promising beginning and confidently believe that further progress can be made in the next few months.

Daniel Jenkins, who is known to our readers for his contributions to the News-Letter, has joined the staff of the Christian Frontier and been given the special assignment of assisting the new editor in the work of the News-Letter. He has already entered upon his duties.

Donald MacKinnon, who is fellow and tutor in philosophy at Keble College, and, like Daniel Jenkins, still in the early thirties, has agreed, without relinquishing his work at Oxford, to give part of his time to help in exploring the questions raised in the Supplement by Archbishop Temple (C.N-L. No. 198), and, in particular, the relation of the Christian Church and of Christians to secular society. This involves a critical examination, on the one hand, of the pre-suppositions of the present Christian attitude to the secular, and, on the other hand, of the ideas and forces which determine the character of modern society. These enquiries will be carried on independently of the News-Letter, and only a small part of the results can find a place in its pages. But they will vitalize the whole of its thought, and ensure that in its attempt to understand and interpret what is happening in contemporary society fundamental issues are not evaded or ignored.

With regard to both appointments I will content myself with saying that none could have given us greater satisfaction.

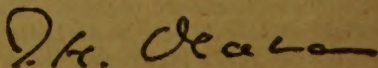
Kenneth Mathews, who has been on our staff for a year, has been throwing all his energies into the question of the ways in which the Churches can welcome and serve the men and women released from the forces. He has talked with all sorts of people, in the services and in civil life, within the Churches and outside them. He has been called into consultation with various groups. In particular a small group, with both service and civilian members, has met regularly month by month, and helped to hammer out the implications of the experience which has been garnered. Kenneth Mathews gives in the Supplement to this issue some of the conclusions at which he and others have arrived. He makes it plain that there is something which almost everyone can do.

The conversations and discussions which have taken place on this subject during the past year have done much more than provide material for a report. They have in many instances stimulated action. I know one layman who after listening to a discussion took the matter at once to his Parish Council, which set up a committee to undertake a house-to-house visitation to ascertain when the demobilized members of the parish were coming back. Forty-five volunteers were enrolled for this purpose and many more were willing to help.

The announcement in this News-Letter about additions to our staff is only an interim report. We have been able up to date to provide for only part of our programme. We are looking for those who can further the work of the Christian Frontier in the spheres of practical activity which are its primary concern. We want to add to our staff two or three more people who will give themselves to discovering what Christian action means in such fields as industry (on which a group of the Christian Frontier has been actively at work),¹ local government, education, and other social activities.

With all this in prospect I feel that the hopes with which we started the Christian News-Letter are nearer to realization than they have ever been, and I believe that under the new editor it will take a big leap forward.

Yours sincerely,



¹ Supplements to C.N.-L. Nos. 190, 204. We hope soon to publish two more Supplements carrying the discussion to a further stage.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SERVED

By KENNETH MATHEWS

In the months ahead the reabsorption into the home community of the men and women who have borne their part in the armed and auxiliary forces of the Crown will be one of the most immediate crises. The way in which the Church responds to this pressing need may determine to a very great extent its power to influence the life of the country during the post-war years. That is the view of many Christians at home who are alive to this situation. Their concern is to discover how best they can bear their part.

CROSSING FRONTIERS

Members may have seen the correspondence in the *Spectator* on "What the soldier thinks." In the article initiating this correspondence, a Captain in the B.L.A. wrote: "It would appear to be as true of this war as of the last that the citizens at home are totally unable to span the gap that separates them from the combatant forces." Whether or not he is right, there can be no excuse if Christians do not make imaginative efforts to bridge that gap. Our strong hope is that we at home may be allowed to build *with* them the kind of world that God intends, but the plain fact is that they may not feel the confidence in us which will make such partnership possible, unless from the start we and they speak roughly the same language. The letters which pass between us, and the talks we have with those either back on leave or already demobilized, will take on a fresh value if aimed at such understanding.

What are the Services thinking? Generalization is perilous. Service life does not mould its members into a single pattern, and what, for instance, may be true of those serving in Germany or in the swamps of Burma at the moment may not reflect the opinion of those either still at the stage of training or posted in places beyond which the battle passed some time ago. Yet there is widespread evidence that the present mood is one of scepticism about any large scale improvement in our manner of living. "Captain B.L.A." sketched this mood sharply. "The British soldier," he wrote, "asks a lot of the future, but does not expect any of it."

It is important to understand this attitude. At first glance it seems to smack of defeatism and to come oddly from men who have done what at one stage of the war appeared almost impossible. But understanding grows as memory travels back to the years after the first Great War—to the contrast, for instance, between the promise of homes fit for heroes and the 576 houses local authorities had completed by March 31, 1920, or to the vivid picture of

the crowds of men gathered round the Labour Exchange on a Wednesday or a Friday morning from 1920 onwards. Rightly or wrongly, the view came to be widely held that the ordinary person could do nothing to mend this state of things. Even the vote made no difference. In face of all that, this current mood of scepticism is not surprising.

Yet while it is necessary to face this attitude with clear eyes, it would be fatal to imagine it is all there is to say. The potential contribution of ex-Service people is immense. Many a man and woman has grown rich in experience, in the skill of community living, in working for a purpose, in the art of reflection and discussion, and in a new capacity to lead and take charge. Besides, it is surely good that they have moved out of the country of unreality, and that they are no longer seeing things through rosy spectacles. Our experience of 1940 has shown us what our race can achieve when it knows the worst. Further, as a fine officer lately wrote from North Italy: "There is beneath the surface a great seeking after something, though they very rarely know what. That is the most hopeful factor of the lot. There is a very thin line between plunging into despair and throwing oneself into the fight for a great new world." And the fact that the Englishman regards grumbling as his inalienable right is relevant to any understanding of his moods. When he says with a grin: "You do not want to take me too seriously," he intends us to place a proper value on his complaints. The fact that he seldom stands aside indefinitely when there is a job to be done, provided always that the leadership on the spot is bold and imaginative, suggests he has much in common with the man in the parable who said "I go not" and went.

THE PLACE OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP

The question then arises: Will that leadership on the spot be given in post-war England—in Church or State? Hope springs from one development, which forcibly strikes the lately returned, and which is still probably not fully grasped by those Service people who express their distrust of all local leadership. That is the vitality of the Civil Defence services and the W.V.S. They have brought into public life numbers who before the war felt no responsibility for local affairs. On the other hand, the existence of widespread fatigue cannot be denied. And so far as the Churches are concerned, there are the additional handicaps of undermanned parishes, the steadily mounting average age of the clergy, of the withdrawal to war service of most of the vigorous younger people from the parishes, and in general of inadequate resources to meet the new situation. In many cases, therefore, we shall have to look for the leaders we need among those who return from the Services, and our job will be to make sure they are given their chance. That will not happen

if older and tired people in Church or secular life are unwilling to make way for them, but cling jealously to their old positions.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP THE BRIDGEHEAD

The right adjustment between the older and the younger will be achieved if it is inspired by true Christian fellowship, and by genuine team-work between clergy and people. It will be in that setting that people can be made to feel that they are wanted, and can be shown where their help is most urgently needed. It will not be achieved if the local congregation leaves its fellowship behind at the church door. Besides it is nonsense to suppose that Christian people can contribute anything to community centres or maintain their standards in local life, unless their experience of fellowship and mutual support is strong. Ex-Service people looking for an outlet for their new taste in community living will quickly recognize any weakness here, just as they can be expected to take an exceedingly poor view of the churchgoer who never speaks to the stranger.

The immediate need, therefore, is to create every possible opportunity for the growth of Christian fellowship. That is why such experiments as are being made in Sheffield (among other places) are especially relevant. Alan Ecclestone, in his C.N.-L. Supplement No. 228, has shown, for instance, how the development of the parish meeting enables the parish communion to become the crown and inspiration of something that exists. Again, where members of a congregation have been able to stay together for a week-end, Christian fellowship has been experienced in an altogether fresh way. This suggests a course of action which other congregations might well take, and in which some of those who return from the wars might gratefully share, even though they belong to a neighbouring parish or district. In such ways the enthusiasm of keen men or women, returning to a church where fellowship is dead, can be maintained until they infect their own congregation.

This is not to say that fellowship is the end. It is rather the bridgehead from which we move out to replace men's secular standards by God's in every walk of life. It would not be necessary to say this if the outsider was always convinced of the sincerity of our intentions, but often he frankly doubts if we care. An M.P. lately put this doubt into words when he said how rare it was in his experience that any Christian group ever made any direct approach to their local authority, stressing the importance of an active housing policy in the area.

Were that true of Church people as a whole, it would be a serious look out indeed. But anyone who has been travelling about England can think readily of numbers of people who certainly care. For them the question is rather: "How can we *show* that we care?" If the answer to that question is found, one of the strongest bridges

will be truly built between the local churches of this country and the men and women who will be demobilized—always, of course, assuming that the caring is disinterested and that there is not intention to exploit the present situation for “churchy” ends.

IMMEDIATE CONCERNS

What then are the most urgent needs? A few nights ago I heard a man, lately back from visiting the B.L.A., say that he had been repeatedly asked two questions: “Will I get a house?” and “Will I get a job?” The order in priority of those two questions, he said, never changed. That suggests an immediate concern for every one of us who is a member of a Christian fellowship.

Housing. In the matter of housing, any Christian group (as an M.P. with wide experience of local government lately said) can ascertain the main housing facts in their neighbourhood by writing to the local Medical Officer of Health and asking for a copy of his latest annual report. They can acquaint themselves with the latest and best national publications on housing. They can then approach some sympathetic member of their housing authority whom they know, and in the light of their knowledge and concern talk the situation out with him. And if no such member exists, there is every reason why the group should make certain that someone who does care gets returned to their local council at the next election. In such ways the opportunity to prod is created, and anyone with experience of local government can testify to the effect that intelligent and determined prodding can have.

On all accounts, the next two years will be outstandingly difficult, so far as housing is concerned. Accordingly, if Christian people, because they are Christian, keep up everywhere this kind of pressure, not only will they help to get the houses that are wanted, and show that they care, but they will be providing that positive local leadership which is the only antidote to the present malaise. What is more, they will be giving the lie direct to the contention that the ordinary person can make no difference. It will be in such widening of the sphere of Christian work that we shall convince civilian and ex-Service people alike that our religion is relevant, and that we are engaged upon work which they can see is significant. Furthermore, we shall have some fresh answers for the men and women who say to the clergy: “But what can we do?”

Jobs. In the matter of jobs, it is harder to see what special action a group of Christian people can take. For every one of us there is the clear duty of getting understood the Christian teaching of vocation, putting before those who will be in a position to choose their work the obligation to make their choice with an eye to the contribution it can make to the good of the community, and not solely to its money value. There is the practical action that one

South London parish has already taken in setting up a panel of men and women—"each with specialized experience of a particular business, trade or profession"—to give information on the career selected, details of qualifications required, and ways of obtaining them. There is also the obvious course of getting in touch with the Resettlement Advice Office, where it exists, and in other cases with the manager of the Local Labour Exchange, to learn where help can most usefully be given. All that can be done now. But if people are to be convinced that religion is relevant, there is the long-term but urgent duty of discovering how men and women can serve God now in a variety of jobs.

Friendliness. The third outstanding need is of sheer human friendliness. The period of settling down again is bound to be awkward, whether it be in the realm of marriage relationships, in the matter of understanding between those who have gone away and those who have stayed behind, or in becoming adjusted in fact to a different pace of living. Major Radcliffe has written wisely and with insight in C.N.-L. Supplement No. 214 of some of these difficulties, which Christian people cannot possibly help to meet unless they make a real effort to understand them beforehand. There then is one immediate job for any Christian group.

Very much will turn on the *first impression* that those who will be demobilized will get of us, of our standards and of our manner of living. It is important that they should sense that they are among friends who, not wishing to foist anything upon them, desire only to work alongside to build a fairer way of living, and who see here not a return to the past, but an adventure into new country. Obviously the opportunities for friendship will be greatest if clergy and laity, keeping themselves informed of who has returned, go out of their way to look them up in their homes. So we may hope to win the confidence that will be the condition of our being able to help readjustment, and to heal the relationships that have been strained or broken.

INARTICULATE NEED

Yet the deepest of all needs remains. The soldier put his finger on this when he wrote: "There is beneath the surface a great seeking after something, though they very rarely know what." We believe we have the secret, but those outside our fellowship cannot see that we have. Nor will they be convinced unless, in front of their eyes, they see a way of living altogether finer and more satisfying than anything else that is offered them. Nothing less than the real thing has a chance of winning men and women, grown skilled in detecting what is sham and insincere. Neither can we hope to answer their questions about life unless we know what they are. Those who say glibly that all that is wanted is instruction in

the Christian faith, forget it is so much double-dutch unless presented in terms that are understood, and directed to the deepest concerns of ordinary people. In the years between the wars, the reason why men and women were willing to listen to Studdert Kennedy was not merely his superb oratory, his poetic imagination, and his passionate conviction. He met men's needs because he knew them, and brought to them an understanding of classic Christian convictions, worked out in terms of *their* experience. Equally if our worship is to meet men's unspoken and almost unrealized longings, it must not only radiate a sense of awe, of power and of burning sincerity, but must be related to their day-to-day needs. The fact that so often in the local church there is no spoken prayer for life or home or work *in the district*, makes it easy to see why people complain that worship in church has nothing to do with them.

COMMUNICATIONS

The need, therefore, for unreserved communication between clergy and people is paramount. In the army the "Padre's hour" has enabled many chaplains both to clear away false ideas about the Christian religion, and to discover what men are really thinking. That experience suggests one method by which this communication might be improved in civil life. In such ways the pressing needs of people can be uncovered, and what at present is meaningless and frustrating can be found out. Even then little will be achieved unless clergy are keen and ready to learn, and unless the regular churchgoers are willing for the changes in cherished methods and traditions the new situation may require.

The future opportunities are tremendous. The Churches can seize them if they move out to the attack in *every* direction. Resources may be limited, yet if they are used with intelligence and imagination, and risks are taken, there is no limit to the contribution that can now be made. Experience won in the Services shows what can be done. At the R.A.F. Moral Leadership Courses leaders are being trained to fight for Christian standards in their Service life. This anticipates what might be done at home, and the hope grows strong that Christian people, nor disheartened by their failures but learning from them, may be inspired and equipped to live their faith *within* the setting of ordinary life and work and so satisfy the real needs of men and women with "the unsearchable riches of Christ."

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

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